

## **THE PLANNING PROCESS**

### **Why Plan?**

It is the city government's responsibility to provide public services and facilities, develop policies, and adopt regulations to guide the growth of a city that meets the needs of its people. The guide for Renton's growth and developments is the Comprehensive Plan.

### **What is a Comprehensive Plan?**

A comprehensive plan is a broad statement of community goals and policies that direct the orderly and coordinated physical development of a city into the future. A comprehensive plan anticipates change and provides specific guidance for future legislative and administrative actions. It reflects the results of citizen involvement, technical analysis, and the judgment of decision-makers.

The Vision, goals, objectives, policies, and maps of the plan provide the basis for the adoption of regulations, programs, and services which implement the plan. The plan serves as a guideline for designating land uses and infrastructure development as well as developing community services.

### **Who Plans?**

Renton residents, business owners, and City staff work together to shape the future of their community through the ongoing development of the Comprehensive Plan. The planning process provides an opportunity for individual citizens to contribute to this effort by attending community meetings to identify issues of concern or by serving on boards or commissions that function as citizen advisors to the City Council.

The primary responsibility for formulating the Comprehensive Plan rests with the Planning Commission. The Commission is a citizens' committee appointed by the Mayor to make recommendations to the Council for land use or policy changes to the Comprehensive Plan. Before making a recommendation, the Commission conducts public hearings on behalf of the Council. Information and comments presented by individual citizens and citizen organizations are weighed by the Planning Commission as it prepares recommendations to City Council for revisions to the Plan.

The ultimate planning decisions are made by the City Council. The Council is responsible for initiating plan reviews, considering Planning Commission recommendations, and adopting the Comprehensive Plan. To implement the Plan, the Council is also responsible for adopting the City's budget, regulations and programs, and for levying taxes and making appropriations.

### **Citizen Participation**

Because public input is vital to effective planning, the City encourages community groups, businesses, and individuals to work together with City staff to identify and achieve community goals. The following principles should guide all future planning efforts:

- Encourage and facilitate public participation in all planning processes and make those processes user-friendly.
- Consider the interests of the entire community and the goals and policies of this Plan before making land use decisions. Proponents of change in land use should demonstrate that the proposed change responds to the interests and changing needs of the entire City, balanced with the interests of the neighborhoods most directly impacted by the project.

- Ensure that the process which identifies new commercial areas or expands existing areas considers the impacts of potential development on affected residential neighborhoods and results in decisions that are consistent with other policies in the Comprehensive Plan.
- Balance the interests of the commercial and residential communities when considering modifications to zoning or development regulations.
- Encourage and emphasize open communication between developers and neighbors about compatibility issues.

### **What's in this Plan?**

This comprehensive plan is designed to be a readable, functional document that will guide Renton's future development and fulfill the City's regional responsibilities in growth management. This plan contains community history and profile, trends, growth projections and the Vision. Each of the elements that follow contain goals, objectives and policies.

### **How is the Plan Implemented?**

After adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the first step toward realizing the City's vision is implementation. Examples for implementation measures are: revision to the Zoning Code, development of a Neighborhood Enhancement Program, participation in the King County Historic Preservation Program, and creation of incentives for private development to incorporate community design features such as public gathering places, art, street furniture and landscaping.

### **Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan**

After proper study and deliberation, amendments to the Comprehensive Plan may be recommended by the Planning Commission to the City Council. The City Council will consider amendments to the Plan not more than annually, except for emergencies. Proposed amendments may be submitted during the first quarter of the year by the Mayor, Planning Commission, City Council, or private parties.

GMA: The City of Renton is revising its Comprehensive Plan in compliance with the State of Washington Growth Management Act of 1990. This legislation requires cities in rapidly growing areas to adopt Comprehensive Plans which include land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities and transportation elements. All elements of the Comprehensive Plan must be consistent with each other and with state-wide and county-wide adopted planning goals. State-wide planning goals include provisions which discourage urban sprawl, support affordable housing, urge protection of the environment, and support provision of adequate urban services. In addition to these requirements, plans must be designed to accommodate 20 year growth forecasts, determined by regional agencies and local jurisdictions, within well defined urban growth areas.

## **COMMUNITY HISTORY AND PROFILE**

### **Physical Setting**

Renton is a city located at the south end of Lake Washington on the edge of metropolitan and rural King County. It is a city with strong residential neighborhoods, a strong industrial employment base, and a growing commercial/office sector. Its location between Seattle, Bellevue, and Tacoma places Renton in the center of a region that is the economic hub of the State. The City is at the crossroads of a regional transportation network where seven State and Interstate highways converge and is central to national and international air traffic.

Renton covers approximately 16 square miles of land and is bordered by King County, Kent, Tukwila, Newcastle and Bellevue with Seattle nearby. The freeway system is a dominant visual feature of this city. Interstate 405 and SR 167 bisect the City, create visual barriers within the community, and define the edges of districts and neighborhoods. It is from this freeway system that many people experience their first impression of the City. It includes portions of the valleys through which the Cedar and Green Rivers flow as well as adjacent uplands to the east and northeast. The natural features that define the edges of the City and its neighborhoods include Lake Washington, the hills, plateaus, stream corridors, and valleys. While development over time has changed the appearance of the community, the natural features have generally remained constant. One exception to this is in the valleys where farmland and wetlands have been converted to other, more intensive uses. This is because these lands are relatively flat and less expensive to develop thus making them more attractive for uses requiring large amounts of land. Much of the development that has occurred in the valleys and the urban area over the last forty years has focused on accommodating the automobile, rather than the pedestrian.

Renton has a strong sense of community. Residential areas are typically organized around schools, parks and other institutions. Renton's existing neighborhoods offer a diverse housing stock ranging in unit type and price. Although it is one of the older cities within the region, Renton still has vacant and underused land in many neighborhoods, including the historic downtown, which offer an opportunity for growth. The plateau areas hold major residential neighborhoods and growth is expected in this area. Abundant views and green wooded areas characterize the hillsides encircling the downtown and along the Cedar River and May Creek. The topography and location of the City afford beautiful scenic views of a variety of significant natural features including Mt. Rainier, the Olympic Mountains, Lake Washington, and the Cascade Mountains.

### **Renton's Past**

The Duwamish tribe were the earliest known Native American people to live in what is now Renton. The Duwamish had their villages near the Cedar and Black River confluence, the Black River and Lake Washington confluence and the base of Earlington Hill.

In 1853 Henry Tobin came upon this area and lay claim to a square half-mile at the Cedar and Black River confluence. Being at the confluence of two rivers near a large lake was thought to be ideal for siting a future city for industrial and commercial growth with navigable transportation nearby. Renton was formally established with the platting of 480 acres of land by Erasmus Smithers in 1856. This original plat comprises much of present downtown Renton. The town grew as local coal deposits were mined.

The downtown core, evolved out of the first plat of town filed in 1876. This plat included the area from the Cedar River south to Seventh Street, between Burnett Street and Mill Avenue. Early industries and businesses included coal mining, lumber, brick making, and rail and freight transportation. Early grocery stores and other family-run stores were located in what is presently downtown Renton. The downtown core was linked to other communities by both the Walla Walla Railroad and the Puget Sound Electric Railway. In its early days Renton had many stores ranging from drug, hardware and junk, grocery, clothing, home furnishing and banking. In 1901, upon incorporation, the City had a total area of one square mile. Since then, incremental annexations have increased the size of the City to encompass approximately 16.7 square miles.

Employment in Renton has been dominated by industry since the City was first settled in the mid 1800s. Because of the nearby forests and proximity to water for transport, the first local industry was timber harvesting and processing. Beginning in the 1870s and continuing through the 1940s, Renton was known for its coal mining and brick making operations. Other industries included production and transport of

lumber, and the supply of steel, pig iron, and equipment to railroad companies. During this period, the City established itself as an important industrial center.

The Boeing Company's decision in the early 1940s to build a new plant at the south end of Lake Washington dramatically influenced the City's future. Rapid growth of the Boeing Company together with the merger of Pacific Car and Foundry into PACCAR, Inc. accelerated the City's rise as a regional industrial and employment center. Renton was transformed from a small town of 4,500 population to a thriving city with a population of 16,039 in the decade from 1940-1950 with construction of the Boeing Company's Renton plant.

The industrial employment center developed at the same locations formerly occupied by the extractive industries – perhaps in part because the transportation network to serve these sites was already well established. This became important because the industrial area remained in the heart of the City and was served by a transportation network which converged on the downtown area.

With the shift away from rail toward automobile and truck transportation in the 1940s and 1950s, a new type of regional transportation hub was created in Renton. Two major freeways (Interstate 405 and SR 167) and three State highways (SR 900, 515 and 169) augmented and replaced the rail system. This road system was developed to provide a regional network allowing access around Lake Washington to serve the Renton industrial area. During this period, the transportation demand shifted from exporting raw materials to importing a major work force.

Renton developed as an independent city with its own downtown area and surrounding neighborhoods. Through a series of annexations, it expanded from one square mile in 1901 to sixteen square miles in 1991. With growth, the City provided more and more urban services to an increasing number of businesses and residents.

### **Renton Today**

Renton has grown from a small compact town, nestled in the Cedar River and Green River Valleys, to a much larger city which now spreads across the valley floors and into the adjacent hills. Renton's nearest neighbors, Kent and Tukwila, have grown similarly. Once separated by rural areas and open space, Renton and its neighbors are now growing together and becoming part of the larger Puget Sound metropolitan region.

Renton is currently home to more than 43,970 (1994 OFM) people and ranks fourth in population in King County. An additional 60,000 people live in the unincorporated area surrounding the City. It is a city with many well-established neighborhoods – as well as some new neighborhoods. Renton continues to be an important center of employment. Over 45,000 people work in the city each day. Most of these people work for the Boeing Company or PACCAR Company, which continue to be major players in the local and regional economy.

Renton, historically, has been a small city and in many ways it still resembles a small town. But several factors place it on the threshold of change: the continued vitality of Renton's industrial sector; regional population growth; and its location at the crossroads of local, national, and international traffic. These factors foreshadow a new role for Renton as an important metropolitan center.

Renton, along with the rest of the region and the country has been experiencing an increase in professional and service jobs over the past few years. Boeing's related research and development facilities in and around Renton have been a major factor in the development of office parks along Grady and in the north end of the Green River Valley. At the same time, there has been increased demand for

good and services as evidenced by the number and types of commercial uses along Rainier Avenue. As more land is converted to office and commercial use there will be less available for future industrial uses and the type of jobs they provide.

The pressures of economic growth and progress have resulted in the construction of office buildings, factories, housing projects, and supporting infrastructure in the City. A network of freeways, arterials and transmission lines criss-cross Renton and divide the community. Development occurring outside of the City has also affected the character of the community. Regional shopping centers competing with Renton's downtown retail core have resulted in a shift in marketable goods in the downtown from general merchandise to specialty items. This transition has changed the visual character of the downtown as businesses open or relocate.

Vacant land remains scattered throughout Renton, but, as time passes, will become an increasingly scarce resource. Some vacant land is environmentally sensitive and not suitable for intensive developments. However, based on current estimates, there are approximately 2,250 acres of vacant and developable land in Renton. The largest blocks of vacant land are generally found in Renton's outlying areas. Smaller pockets of vacant land and vacant lots are found in most of the City's existing neighborhoods.

The challenge for Renton is to manage growth in a manner which maintains the desirable features of the City while being flexible enough to take advantage of opportunities for change.

## TRENDS

Rapid regional growth has produced development pressure throughout the City. As in many other communities, recent commercial development has shifted away from downtown, and a growing number of retail and office uses are locating along major roadways and within residential neighborhoods. While this increases the convenience to some residents, it also erodes the viability of the downtown, contributes to traffic congestion, intrudes upon neighborhoods and encourages strip commercial development along the major thoroughfares throughout the City and the adjacent unincorporated area. In addition, multi-family development, which is increasing as a percentage of total housing stock, is frequently clustered around these commercial developments along major arterials.

**Single Family:** Traditionally, single family development has consumed the greatest amount of the City's developable land. However, according to the 1990 Census, in recent years (between 1980-89), the supply of multi-family housing has grown at a faster rate than single family housing. Between 1980 and 1990, 5600 housing units were built in Renton: 67% of these were multi-family units. This has brought the amount of multi-family housing within the city from roughly 40% of the total housing stock in 1980 to 50% in 1990. If current trends continue, the City's total supply of multi-family housing could outpace single family housing in the future.

**Multi-family Development:** Multi-family units in Renton increased at a faster rate than single family units between 1980 and 1990. Single family increased 12%, mobile homes increased 112%, 5-9 unit multi-family increased 141% and 10-49 units multi-family increased 94%. This growth pattern changed the overall percentage of multi-family housing as a percentage of the housing stock from roughly 40% in 1980 to 50% by 1990.

**Commercial Centers:** Continuation of the low intensity, suburban growth pattern will likely result in more commercial shopping areas in the Renton planning area, and expansion of the existing commercial areas along arterials and into surrounding neighborhoods within the City. Evidence of this development pattern can be seen in the Coal Creek area, Benson Hill and Fairwood, and along Sunset and Duvall in Renton. Strip commercial is another common result of low intensity development, especially along

principal and major arterial routes; one example is along both sides of Benson Road south of Carr/SE 176<sup>th</sup>. Unfortunately this development pattern carries economic and environmental costs to the entire City. Economically there is a cost for the extra driving required for work and personal trips. In terms of environmental costs there is the declining air quality from automobile emissions and inefficient land use and disruptions to existing neighborhoods.

**Institutions:** The expansion of the Valley Medical Center and related development is expected to continue. Renton Technical College is currently expanding its operations on campus. As both of these institutional uses grow to serve the region, they are expected to expand beyond current boundaries and into surrounding neighborhoods.

**Industrial:** Industrial employment, especially manufacturing, is declining nation-wide. In the Puget Sound region, while the proportion of jobs in the industrial sector is projected to decline, the number of manufacturing jobs in this area is expected to remain relatively stable, at least through the year 2020.

In Renton, commercial uses, mainly office and services are increasing as a sector of the employment base. This trend reflects the increased demand for office and service uses which is symptomatic of the regional economy's gradual shift from an industrial base to a service base. However, this trend is not as pronounced in Renton as elsewhere for two important reasons. First, according to the 1989 Community Profile, the City has a large, existing, industrial employment base, and second, it also has a relatively large supply of land in industrial uses (14%). This compares to 7% for commercial use and 24% for residential use. Industrial zoning accounted for 23% of vacant lands while commercial was 2.8% public use 8.4% and residential 65.5%.

In Renton, the most noticeable changes are occurring in the mix and type of industrial activities within the City. Most noticeable is a trend away from heavy industrial/manufacturing toward medium and light industrial uses. Although manufacturing is expected to remain stable and industrial jobs are expected to decline, the number of light and medium industrial jobs in wholesale/transportation/communications/utilities is projected to nearly double in the Renton area through 2020.

A second trend is a blurring of land use category descriptions as technology changes the way work is done and more activities include office and computer components. This change is manifested by an increase in the mixes of uses, either within one company or within one building or complex. For example, many businesses are constellations of light industrial, manufacturing research and development and office uses.

Changes are expected to occur in Renton's employment areas incrementally over a long period of time. Some industrial areas will redevelop into other uses but in some cases inappropriate infrastructure or cleanup of contaminants on the site may limit redevelopment. In other cases viable industrial uses exist on a site and will operate for several years but property owners anticipate a change in use over the long term. For example, both the Stoneway and Barbee Mill sites have submitted proposals for future projects mixing office and residential uses. Although the rate of change in industrial lands is slow, it is significant because if too much land in converted to non industrial uses, it could have a detrimental effect of retaining the industrial base.

The office and service sector is expanding in terms of both overall acreage and intensity of use. New mid-rise office development of 4-6 stories is spreading south and north of the downtown in areas previously zoned industrial.

Commercial retail and service areas outside of the downtown are gradually sprawling along major arterials. In these areas the trend is toward continuation of low rise automobile oriented commercial

developments. In many cases these developments compete with businesses in downtown Renton. In several areas of the City light industrial developments which were displaced by higher intensity uses in the downtown core/north Valley, or need older structures or cheaper land, are located along the City's arterials.

**Office Development:** Office development is currently occurring or proposed in and around downtown Renton in the Green River Valley, North Renton, and Kenneydale. Development pressure for new office construction is expected to continue in Renton due to existing large employment base, availability of land and the relatively good freeway access. Improved transit service in the areas is expected to enhance this trend.

**Schools:** Multiple use of school facilities has been a trend that will likely continue. Renton School District enrollment has been declining overall since its peak in 1970. While enrollment has declined by 24% since 1970, the rate of decline has slowed from 15% during the 1970s to 10% during the 1980s. Enrollment is down slightly from 1990 figures but overall it is relatively stable. Long term projections anticipate larger enrollments and an increased need for facilities in the district based on increased birth rates for the population in general.

**Religious Centers:** The trend over the past decade or so has been for religious groups to provide more services to their members and the public at large. These services require additional land and facilities for schools, gymnasiums, offices, parking, expanded hours of worship and social services. As a result these facilities are having a greater impact on adjacent neighborhoods and the existing infrastructure.

**Open Space:** Renton is developing an ambitious open space acquisition program within the Department of Community Services. The program's main goals are to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural areas in an urban environment and to afford public access to these areas with limited development and disturbances. Many of the sites will remain relatively undisturbed, while wildlife and habitat areas that are less fragile will be more developed with park and recreation facilities and allow greater public access.

As the City of Renton grew, many of those portions of the City which have natural hazardous features were passed over for land more easily developed. Now, however, with the amount of easily developable land diminishing, the critical areas are becoming more attractive for urban uses.

**Annexation:** The City has historically undertaken annexation in response to requests from local property owners. For many years most annexations were of small areas which were already urbanized. Future trends are likely to be three types of annexations: 1) annexation of larger undeveloped parcels within the urban designated area; 2) annexation of smaller infill parcels within urban area which are developed at urban densities, but lack urban levels of services such as sewer; and 3) annexation of commercial and/or residential neighborhoods within the urban designated area which already developed in King County.

**Traffic:** There is one solid traffic trend within the region: traffic is increasing. A variety of reasons explain this increase: the growth in population, jobs and housing; more people are now commuting within the region; the location of employment and housing impacts the length and variety of trips made; new housing development is occurring on vacant land in outlying parts of the metropolitan area rather than on land closer to traditional urban centers; and employment areas are relocating to suburban areas.

The general increase in standard of living in the region also generates more traffic because, as the standard of living goes up, car ownership increases and so does trip making. In addition, the average length of trips is also increasing. The cumulative effect of all these factors is more cars on the road and greater traffic congestion.

Current traffic improvement projects and programs undertaken by the City's Transportation Division include realignment of the S-Curves and the addition of High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV) lanes to Interstate 405, completion of Oakesdale Ave SW, the widening of Grady Way, development and implementation of the North Renton Transportation Plan, and establishment of a system of truck routes. The City is also presently working on expansion of its system of pedestrian and bicycle trails.

**Airport:** The airport is already a heavily used facility and demand on the airport continues to steadily grow. This growth is primarily due to the closure of other general aviation airports in the region such as those which were at Bellevue and Kent. It is also partially due to the increases in production at the Boeing plant.

In addition there is increased demand for seaplane activity at the seaplane base due to closure of seaplane facilities elsewhere in the region.

**Public Facilities:** There is no one trend which can be used to describe these various facilities. For example, some municipal facilities may become more decentralized in the future while others could do the opposite. Library facilities, at least for the remainder of this decade, are not expected to decentralize. Expectations are that the main facility downtown and the Highlands branch will continue to serve the needs of the community. Most municipal administrative functions are also expected to remain centralized with the development of a new municipal complex in the downtown.

**Fire Services:** Fire services by their nature must be decentralized in order to provide adequate protection for the entire City. As the City grows in population and land area, additional fire stations will be needed for new and currently under-served areas. The *Fire Department Master Plan* (March 1987) cites the Kennydale and the Tiffany Park neighborhoods and the Green River Valley industrial area as having level service deficiencies due to the response time in those areas. In addition, it states, "*If annexations occur in the East Kennydale, Sierra Heights, and East Duvall Avenue communities and in the Cedar River corridor, they will have substandard fire protection based on the five-in-five standard and current station locations.*" The "five-in-five" standard is the department's desired level of service; to have five fire fighters on the scene five minutes after receiving the call.

**Downtown:** The Downtown Renton Association is leading an effort to change the gradual decline in the downtown shopping area. Downtown merchants are working with the City to implement a redevelopment concept for the downtown emphasizing mixed use development, including residential uses, and supporting additional street amenities and parking improvements. Although this effort is too new to show many results, several new developments are in process including a multi-story senior housing complex.

**Environment:** In addition, the development within the City's sphere of influence and within the City itself has contributed to some environmental changes. Because of the increase in impervious surfaces and land clearing, run-off has increased, and consequently flooding has also increased in downstream areas. Streams and rivers have experienced increased siltation from erosion resulting in flooding and delta formations. While no seismic events of any magnitude have occurred, those areas of Renton with higher seismic risks than other could be affected in the future. Additional inappropriate development in these areas could pose a public safety risk in future seismic events. The historical coal mines of the area were not fully documented and many abandoned mine shafts exist in areas which will likely be used for urban growth. Finally, each year the City has landslides which threaten private property, and impede roads and utilities.

Urban growth will probably continue to spread into the remaining rural areas and open space that now separates Renton from adjacent urban areas. As Renton's downtown grows, it is likely to remain as a



relatively low-profile urban center. Destination-oriented specialty shopping will draw patrons from the local and regional area. Currently, the City is working in cooperation with the Downtown Renton Association to improve the urban design of the area. Commercial and industrial development within Renton will continue to be primarily auto-oriented and dominated by large surface parking lots. On a citywide basis, only modest improvements are likely to be seen in the pedestrian environment. Renton's residential areas will form loosely defined neighborhoods consisting primarily of a collection of housing developments.

## **GROWTH PROJECTIONS**

During the last part of the 1980s there was an increase in the population of Renton and the unincorporated area surrounding the City. The number of work places within the City has also increased. As a result of the growth, vacant land was converted to development. Vacant land not in public ownership or protected by land use regulation is rapidly disappearing as the City matures. In addition, the value of the remaining open land is increasing.

### **Population**

In 1990, the population of the Renton planning area was estimated at 101,600. This area includes the City of Renton as well as unincorporated urban areas surrounding the city including portions of Skyway, the East Renton Plateau and North Soos Creek. Of the total Renton planning area populations, 43,970 (1994 OFM) people lived within the City of Renton and roughly 60,000 people lived in the currently unincorporated portions of the planning area.

### **Employment**

In 1990 estimates showed approximately 59,656 employees working within the Renton planning area; about 53,851 (86%) of these employees worked within the City of Renton. By the year 2010, employment in the Renton planning area is forecast to increase by an additional 32,218 jobs. Approximately 27,300 of these new jobs (85%) would be located within current city boundaries. Because Renton's urban center is almost at build-out in terms of total jobs, most of the employment growth would happen in Employment Areas outside of the Urban Center mainly located within the Green River Valley.

Preliminary King County employment growth targets would ask the City of Renton to accommodate fewer jobs than growth forecasts because the Countywide Planning Policies direct job growth from non-urban center areas into urban centers. Because Renton's urban center is almost built out and cannot accommodate a significant amount of employment growth, this approach would direct job growth from non-urban center areas in Renton into urban centers which have not yet approached build out. Preliminary growth targets would ask Renton to plan for roughly 4,000 fewer jobs than growth forecasts. Preliminary growth targets for the unincorporated portions of Renton's planning area have not yet been proposed by King County.

Both the growth forecasts and growth targets, however, indicate substantial employment growth within the Renton planning area over the next 20 years. This significant growth in employment will create a strong associated demand for housing growth within the Renton area.

### **Household**

The City is planning for a twenty year period of growth. In 1990, the City of Renton had a total population of 41,395 persons. With the 60,198 people residing in the annexation area, the total population for the Planning Area (City plus annexation area) in 1990 was 101,593. This translates to

18,031 households in the City, 22,392 households in the annexation area, or a total of 40,423 households in the Planning Area in 1990. Expected increases in population will result in 57,409 persons (or 25,956 households) living within the current city limits by the year 2010; and, 77,752 persons (or 29,128 households) in the annexation area. The total forecasted population of Renton's Planning Area is expected to be 135,161 persons (or 55,084 households) by 2010.